



Pantheist Vision

VOL. 41 NO. 4

UNIVERSAL PANTHEIST SOCIETY JOURNAL

WINTER 2024-25

Nature Journaling for Pantheists

by Harold W. Wood, Jr.



Keeping a Nature Journal provides an opportunity to study the natural world, to grow a deeper relationship with the Earth, to develop a greater awareness and caring for the Earth. A Nature Journal is an opportunity for personal growth and to study the evolving natural world.”

– Bonnie Gisel

Introduction

A journal is not a “diary.” A diary typically records daily events in your life, or your feelings and thoughts, and is inwardly focused. A nature journal is nearly the opposite; it is outwardly focused, even though it may also generate personal feelings and creativity that can be incorporated into what you put on the page. As Pantheists, we want to try to turn to things greater than ourselves. Nature journaling is a vital spiritual exercise for Pantheists because it encourages a deep, mindful connection with the natural world, fostering a sense of awe, gratitude, and reverence for the interconnectedness of life. One of our earliest members, Carol Eames, wrote

in our newsletter in 1979, “My Pantheist lifestyle revolves around a constant daily awareness of natural processes around me. My journal records weather changes, migration behavior of birds, location of wildflowers... I engage in a personal exploration of the natural world which is our religious inspiration.” Sitting in one place with pen and paper in hand enhances a mystical communion with Nature because it requires you to observe carefully, be curious, and reflect creatively about what to put down on the page. As author Roseann Hanson says, nature journaling “combines time in nature with mindful practice – a kind of meditation that cultivates awareness, grounds us in the present, and fosters curiosity and kindness.”

Benefits of Keeping a Nature Journal

As John Muir Laws says, “The ability to hold things in our head is really limited. Journaling gets us past the limits of our brain’s capacity of how much information it can store and hold and manipulate at one time. The journal frees up our brain, once you’ve got all of this down on paper, your brain is freed up to operate at more sophisticated levels.”

And as author Stephen Hatch writes, “Journaling is a wonderful spiritual practice. When I’m outdoors in an especially beautiful place, I experience an altered state of consciousness that gives birth to fresh insight. I then record the insight in my journal, which becomes a sort of “bible” of the epiphanies I’ve been given...”

Keeping a nature journal on a regular basis awakens our senses and helps us become better observers and forge a stronger connection with Nature. When you sketch something you’ve seen or find words to describe it, it forces you to slow down, to look closer, and to notice more. You can jot down things that surprised or

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interested you, along with questions that you can research later. It is a valuable way to integrate art and science, questioning and spirituality, wonder and data.

Tips for Nature Journaling

There are many kinds of nature journals: scientific, artistic, meditative, philosophical, polemical, reverential, and more. There is no one single “right way” to do it. Some nature journalists consider a nature journal as primarily intended to help you become a better naturalist, and others use it mainly to create a portfolio of artistic endeavors. But most advocates say you must make your nature journal in your own way. Even advocates of the artistic aspect, like John Muir Laws, insist that “the goal of nature journaling neither to create a dry scientific document, nor to create a portfolio of pretty pictures, but to develop a tool to help you see, wonder, and remember your experiences.” The focus is on observation, perceptions, and feelings about the world of nature around you.

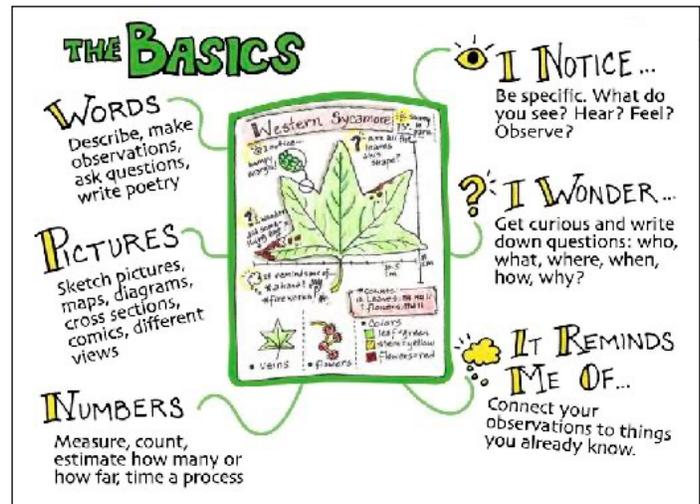
The most important thing is to make journaling a regular practice throughout the seasons. Make at least two to three entries per week to keep your journal alive. You might journal in your backyard with a large sketchbook or carry a small notebook when outdoors, returning inside to complete your journal next to your shelf of field guides or nature specimens. Modern technology can help with identification apps like iNaturalist (plants and animals), Merlin (for birds), or Sky Guide (astronomy), and you can even import your observations directly into a digital journaling app such as Day One. Soon, nature journaling will make you happier and become a habit you can’t live without.

Most guides to getting started in nature journaling advocate using a nature journal as a “thinking tool” to help you think differently, encouraging the use of three rather different parts of your brain. To do this, you put a combination of words, pictures, and numbers on the page. This requires you to (1) notice, (2) question, and (3) reflect on what you are seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, or feeling in nature.

Journaling, using words, pictures, and numbers, connects the language, visual, and analytical parts of the brain to sensory experiences from nature, bringing each other alive. With this method you train your mind to really pay attention to the natural world.

Nature journals historically began with scientific record-keeping on nature expeditions. In those kinds of journals, the emphasis was on naming, labeling, identifying, counting, and measuring. These can be an easy start for your exploration of your own backyard, or a nearby park, pond, mountainside, or stream. Can you create a record over time of all the native flora and fauna that are seen around your home or on a favorite hike?

Today, many nature journal advocates emphasize the artistic aspects instead. You will find many examples of nature journals online that depict gorgeously rendered sketches, perfectly balanced page layouts, and stunning calligraphic lettering. But these are all done by professional artists – not by everyday people. Likewise, many of the most notable books and authors advocating nature journaling seem to stress the artistic aspect. These include well-known and respected people like John Muir Laws, Clare Walker Leslie, Roseann Hanson, and many others. Most online nature clubs and available blogs, books, and YouTube videos also seem to take this approach, which



A part of the pocket-sized [Your Quick Start Guide to Nature Journaling](#) free from the [Wild Wonder Foundation](#).

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Nature Journaling *continued from page 2*

requires you to already know or to acquire what, at least to me, appear to be some fairly impressive sketching and drawing techniques, sometimes rivaling that of a professional scientific illustrator.

We don't have to learn to draw; we draw to learn. In nature journaling, you are not trying to be a professional artist. Rather, drawing is simply one tool among many with which to intensely study a subject and a quick way to record relative size, color, and features. You can also use photos and even reference audio recordings, but quick snap-shots might best be used as a guide for further research or adaptation later; the goal is to slow down, not speed through the process.

You can still do nature journaling if you lack motor skills or artistic training to do much sketching. If you like writing, you can start with that, whether writing by hand, with a smartphone, on a computer keyboard, or using your phone for dictation. You don't have to write in full sentences, but you can just use fragments, titles, subtitles, colored letters, bubble letters, labels inside a box, or bullet points to list all the species you see. You can write sideways or try writing an epigram or aphorism or copying down an inspirational nature quote from a favorite author. You can write playfully (puns anyone?) or scientifically, philosophically, or poetically, using simple forms like haiku or free verse.

Many authors, especially the pantheistic 19th-century Transcendentalists, encourage you to not only observe and record your data but also to question and reflect. We can learn a lot about keeping a nature journal from such pantheistic nature writers as John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, and John Burroughs. Thoreau and Muir always put the date and location at the top, often a note on the weather, and then recorded their observations of species witnessed, sometimes enhanced with drawings of insect tracks or the shape of a tree or flower, drawn not to make a pretty picture, but to help embed its defining characteristics in the memory. They would then add their thoughts and feelings generated by the scene. Contemporary nature journaling advocates likewise suggest you first orient yourself and record basic metadata, like location, date, time, elevation, and where you are in the world: which way is north, whether the moon can be seen, the time of sunrise and sunset, wind direction and speed, and a note on the weather. The very act of writing such a heading helps you align yourself in place, settle down, look around, and get the flow going for the next steps.

Nature observations may include not only sketching or writing but also making leaf rubbings, pressing flowers, counting the seeds in a pod, or if you see a berry, you might make a smear of its color on your journal. The important thing is to record what you notice and what you wonder about and use it as a springboard for creativity.

Several ideas for ways to nature journal are suggested by the Wild Wonder Foundation

1. Observe the details of a place using the technique "I Notice/I Wonder/It Reminds Me Of." Then, look inward to reflect on your experience and feelings. Write a simple haiku or free-verse poem inspired by this experience.
2. Find two similar objects (e.g., acorns from different species of oaks or perhaps branches from a willow and a cottonwood) and diagram and label the similarities and differences.
3. "Zoom out, zoom in." Draw and diagram an object at three scales: show some portion at life size, magnify an interesting detail, and zoom out to get the big-picture view.
4. Sit down, close your eyes, and listen to the sounds around you. Then, make a page with you in the center and a map of all the sounds you hear. Use symbols, diagrams, words, lines, labels, and sketches to map what you hear.
5. Train yourself to find the numbers behind your observations. You might count the number of birds of one species you see, measure the circumference of trees, or the times of bird-song, or use bar graphs.

Many guidebooks on nature journaling provide many additional prompts, imagery, or quotes to inspire you further; see the "Resources for Nature Journaling" below.

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Nature Journaling *continued from page 3*

There is nothing wrong with a nature journal that also incorporates your personal thoughts and feelings. After all, a major result of nature journaling is increasing your gratitude and reverence for the natural world. That aligns perfectly with the Universal Pantheist Society's primary mission: "We seek renewed reverence for the Earth and a vision of Nature as the ultimate context for human existence." That is the essential perspective that will help us as a larger community to come together to conserve the world's wild places and plants and animals and find ways of co-existing and enjoying wildness in our everyday lives.

At the end of each entry of your nature journal, I find it most valuable to write an expression of gratitude for all you have seen and witnessed in Nature.

Conclusion

In our world today, restoring gratitude for our own natural surroundings – that which makes life possible and meaningful physically, mentally, and emotionally – is our greatest need. Accordingly, keeping a nature journal may be a most enriching spiritual exercise with practical benefits. It is one way to help restore the kind of connection with the natural world that Pantheists feel is so necessary. As John Muir Laws says, "Journaling is an invitation to dive into the world and rediscover beauty, and awe – a way to turn sustained, compassionate attention toward seemingly everyday moments and find reason to celebrate and give thanks." To me, nature journaling can be an important spiritual practice for Pantheists. Please share your own experience with nature journaling with us



Resources for Nature Journaling

Books

The Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling (2019), by John Muir Laws

Keeping a Nature Journal: Deepen Your Connection with the Natural World All Around You, 3rd Edition: (2021), by Clare Walker Leslie

Grounded: A Guided Journal to Help You Reconnect with the Power of Nature- and Yourself (2022), by Patricia H. Hasbach

A Field Guide to Nature Journaling: Hike And Draw Guide Books Paperback (2023), by James Samuel Sisti

Nature Journaling for a Wild Life (2020), by Roseann Beggy Hanson

Dwelling in Wonder: Nature Journaling as a Spiritual Practice (2024), by Starr Regan DiCiurcio

Online

The *Wild Wonder Foundation* is a new (2022) organization that encourages nature journaling and connection through attention, curiosity, art, science, and community. Don't miss their new Quick Start Guide to Nature Journaling, as depicted on page 1 of this issue. <https://www.wildwonder.org/>

An Introduction to Nature Journaling by John Muir Laws <https://johnmuirlaws.com/an-introduction-to-nature-journaling/>. A 45-minute video exploring different ways of doing journaling.

How to get started with Nature Journaling by John Muir Laws <https://johnmuirlaws.com/how-to-get-started-with-nature-journaling/>. Wise advice from the foremost nature journaling advocate of our time.

Thoreau's Style of Keeping a Journal by Donna L. Long. <https://donnalong.com/thoreaus-style-of-keeping-a-nature-journal/>. Thoreau's journal taught him how to balance poetic wonder and scientific rigor as he explored the natural world.

Nature Journal Writing with John Muir, by Harold Wood. <https://planetpatriot.net/journal-writing-with-john-muir/>.

20 Nature Journaling Ideas to Connect with the Natural World, by Day One App. <https://dayoneapp.com/blog/nature-journaling/>. Prompts that work for digital journaling or traditional paper and pencil, especially for non-artists.

Pantheist Viewpoints

“The pleasure and value of every walk or journey we take may be doubled to us by carefully noting down the impressions it makes upon us.”

- John Burroughs

“Wandering through a landscape being led solely by curiosity and open eyes is the fertile ground for true discovery. Wandering allows us to get in touch with what excites us.”

- Jon Young

Field guides express the amalgamation of many people’s life work. They are treasure chests of hard-earned knowledge that has been passed on and built upon. Therefore, they are the modern equivalent of the knowledge of an elder from a traditional culture: they hold the collective experience of many generations. These are wonderful books that can be exciting to sit with, gleaning gems of information and soaking up the detail of drawings, photographs, and diagrams. But they really only teach us when we are ready to absorb. Don’t use them as textbooks but rather as cherished magical books that hold innumerable secrets. Leave the field guides behind when you head outside... allow the field to provoke your curiosity, and when you get back, you will have something to look for in the field guides.”

- Ellen Haas



*Red fox by Alain Audet
from Pixaby.*

“Many religions have sacred texts. What about Pantheism? Pantheists believe Nature and deity are one in the same. So the more we learn about Nature, the more we know about the divine. Informative writings on Nature may be considered holy texts because they illuminate our concept of divinity. Unlike religions with a single holy text, Pantheists have hundreds of them, many beautifully illustrated! Every Pantheist has a bookshelf that reflects his or her special interests; my favorite titles include the natural history field guides. These books open our eyes to the marvels of Nature as they draw us nearer to the Earth (animal, plant, and mineral guides), to the sky (weather guides), and to the universe (star guides). Taken together, I think of them as ‘field guides to God,’ to the sacred reality all around us. I felt a real, if diffused, sense of sacredness in Nature before consulting field guides. But the books gave breadth and depth to my religious feelings by bringing me in closer touch with myriad manifestations of the divine. Now more aware of my surroundings than ever before, I live in constant amazement at the wonder of it all.”

- Gary Suttle

“Never before could the average person pick up an unfamiliar insect, flower, or mushroom, and without even leaving the forest, immediately identify it and discover everything about it by consulting a smartphone... Ordinary naturalists can gain an unprecedented understanding of the natural world - from microscopic cells to entire continents, from fractions of a second to decades - thanks to the advent of breathtakingly detailed nature videos, remote sensing by satellites, scanning electron microscopy, webcams, drones, molecular techniques and other tools. Contemporary naturalists can and should embrace modern technology and the ability to be connected to knowledge and each other via the Internet, social media, and mobile devices. But we must also leave room in our lives for a genuine, direct, and contemplative connection with nature. The question is, how do you make that connection? The answer is straightforward: by being present, mindful, watchful, and willing to do a little work. Given the speed of contemporary life, it can be a challenge to feel connected with nature. The virtual can sometimes cloud the view of the actual. We should use technology as a *tool* to improve our connection with nature, rather than as the *source* of that connection. Keeping your own calendar-journal can be one of the best ways to develop your own sense of our own place.”

- Nathaniel T. Wheelwright

Over Forty Years of Pantheist Vision

In preparation for the Universal Pantheist Society's 50th anniversary next year, we have compiled a fully indexed catalog of each issue of our early *Newsletter* and quarterly *Pantheist Vision*, which replaced our earlier publication in 1980.

Though small and relatively short-lived, the *Newsletter* established and confirmed many basic themes we have adopted ever since. *Pantheist Vision* featured longer articles, with a wide array of writings exploring various approaches to Pantheism. In reviewing these 40-plus years, many of the quarterly issues offered energetic contributions from members, whether as letters to the editor, essays, or poems, sometimes argumentative, sometimes inspirational, but all focused on how we can fulfill our purpose of embracing Nature as the ultimate context for human existence.

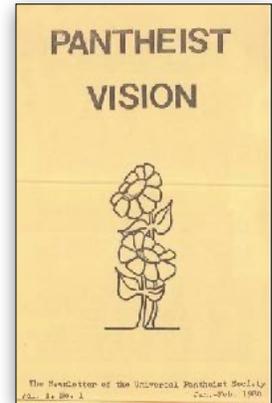
Sometimes, vigorous debates extended over several issues. One was whether television detracts us from being close to Nature or helps people understand it better. Another discussed the relative merits of tolerance vs. intolerance for different viewpoints within Pantheist philosophy. A big one was on the proper role of science in both our philosophies and our nomenclature. These discussions have always helped express the delightful diversity of opinion among Pantheists while firmly confirming our commonalities.

Notably, every issue of *Pantheist Vision* includes one of our most popular features – a full page with contributions written by members under the title “What Pantheism Means to Me.” These usually short snippets emphasize our commonality within our individual uniqueness. So many of us have discovered Pantheism as just a collective name for personal feelings long held. We are proud that we are a religious organization that, instead of telling you what to believe, asks you, our members, to share your individual and distinctive insights with the rest of your fellow members.

Our inclusive approach to Pantheism contrasts with virtually all other Pantheist organizations formed since our origin in 1975. We have no creed or requirements to follow any particular belief or practices; rather, we seek to provide ways for individuals to promote their own spiritual growth and understanding. The writings in *Pantheist Vision* help to remind us that what unites us is a burning heartfelt reverence for the Earth and “a vision of Nature as the ultimate context for human existence.” It is this approach that has filled the pages of both our early *Newsletter* and *Pantheist Vision* since its inception.

As one of our earliest members, Nancy Rerucha, wrote in our newsletter in 1977, our foundational religious texts are not human but are from Nature: “Words can be bent, twisted, molded, to be used to fit one’s own perspectives, to repudiate another’s. But a fiery sunset, an awesome snow-capped peak, a circling hawk, a flower glittered with dew, these have all said more to me than a million of mankind’s words ever have or ever will.”

All members of the Universal Pantheist Society now have access to all of the back issues of *Pantheist Vision* (1980-2024) and our earlier *Newsletter* (1976-1979)! Each issue is fully indexed. These indexes are alphabetical, and being digital in PDF format, they are also full-text searchable. Going forward, we will update the current decadal Index with the publication of each new issue.



*The first Issue of
Pantheist Vision
Vol. 1, No. 1, Jan-
Feb, 1980.*

Join the Universal Pantheist Society and access all back issues of *Pantheist Vision* and its predecessor *Newsletter*:

<https://www.pantheist.net/join-us.html>

What Pantheism Means to Me

by *Members of the Society*

To be part of the natural world. To believe that all of nature is equally important. To not believe in organized religion that worships a deity. All things are connected.

- Doreen Pierson

To feel the oneness of all things.

- Alison Hedburg

I think I am still learning this. But I do realize that without nature/the planet, humans cannot survive.

I know that if we don't take care of the planet that it can't sustain us, or life.

I respect all life, and I don't feel that my humanness is above any other form of life. If I find a spider in my house I do my best to return it safely to the outdoors, or I just leave it be. My husband feeds the hummingbirds and I enjoy watching them flutter to eat. I/we recycle where we can.

I'm sure I have much to learn to become a better steward of this earth I call home, and this is what I'm hoping my membership will help me to learn.

- D.M. Sunny Baker

To be a Pantheist is to be a lover of Nature and to honor our responsibility to treat the Earth and all things of the Earth with the deepest respect; to live simply, humbly, and poetically upon the Earth; and to find sacredness in nature and soul in wildness.

To be a Pantheist is to be part of a greater community of like-minded people.

- Vicki Nordness

I have always had a sense of the intrinsic value of all life, but I didn't know about Pantheism until I met my husband. He introduced me to Pantheism and the more he talked about it the more I realized that is what I believed all along. Before him I used to describe my beliefs as "all life is equally sacred and intertwined".

- Jennifer Hall



Chickadee by Veronica Andrews from Pixabay.

Pantheist Vision

(ISSN 0742-5368) is the quarterly journal of the Universal Pantheist Society, P.O. Box 69644, Tucson, AZ 85737

E-mail: ups@pantheist.net

World Wide Web: www.pantheist.net

and on Facebook at:

www.facebook.com/pantheists/ and

www.facebook.com/groups/universalpantheists/

Printed with New Wind Energy on 100% Recycled Paper

Editor: Harold Wood

Designer and Assistant Editor: Margie Gibson

The Universal Pantheist Society is a non-profit religious organization, founded in 1975. The purposes of the Society are: "to unite Pantheists everywhere into a common fellowship; to spread information about Pantheism to the public; to facilitate discussion and communication among Pantheists; to provide for the mutual aid and defense of Pantheists everywhere; to stimulate a revision of social attitudes away from anthropocentrism and toward reverence for the Earth and a vision of Nature as the ultimate context for human existence; and to take appropriate action toward the protection and restoration of the Earth."

Recognizing that freedom of belief is inherent in the Pantheist tradition, Society bylaws prohibit the requirement of any particular interpretation of religion or subscription to any particular religious belief, doctrine, or creed.

Board of Directors

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Co-founder: Derham Giuliani (1931-2010).

Pantheist Holidays for Winter 2024-2025

December

- 4 - Joseph Raphson (1648 -1715)
- 11 - International Mountain Day
- 21 - Winter Solstice
- 31 - John Denver Day

January

- 5 - National Bird Day
- 6 - Alan Watts Day (1915-1973)
- 10 - Robinson Jeffers Day (1887-1962)
- 11 - Aldo Leopold Day (1887-1948)
- 29 - Edward Abbey Day (1927-1989)

February

- 2 - World Wetlands Day
- 12 - Charles Darwin Day (1809-1882)
- 14 - Pale Blue Dot Day
- 17 - Periodic Table of the Elements Day
- 20 - Ansel Adams Day (1902-1984)

*Fox artwork by Luciana Papp Design
on Pixaby.*



Bull Elk, National Elk Refuge, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, courtesy U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

*We seek renewed reverence for the Earth
and a vision of Nature as the ultimate
context for human existence...*



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 P.O. BOX 69644
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